



PROJECT MUSE®

Diplomacy's Value

Rathbun, Brian C.

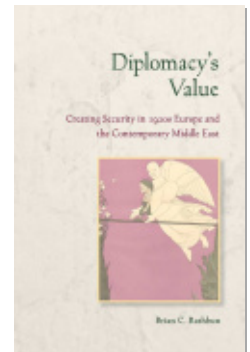
Published by Cornell University Press

Rathbun, Brian C.

Diplomacy's Value: Creating Security in 1920s Europe and the Contemporary Middle East.

1 ed. Cornell University Press, 2014.

Project MUSE.muse.jhu.edu/book/43565.



➔ For additional information about this book

<https://muse.jhu.edu/book/43565>

Searching for Stresemann

THE LESSONS OF THE 1920s FOR DIPLOMACY AND
THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

There is a reason why scholars of international relations have not devoted significant attention to the 1920s. The maelstrom of the 1930s sucks up all the intellectual oxygen. It is somewhat natural that some, if not the most, cataclysmic events in world history—the Great Depression, the eliminationist Nazi regime, and World War II—attract more interest. Yet there is a lot to learn from the 1920s as well, both about what could have been in Europe and what could still be in the Middle East.

It is by no means certain that had Germany, France, and Britain continued down the diplomatic path forged by Stresemann, Briand, and Chamberlain, that Europe and the world at large would have avoided the rise of fascism in Germany. Their actions surely could not have averted the Great Depression and perhaps not even rise of nationalism that followed in its wake. And it seems that there was no deal that would have left Adolf Hitler satisfied, short of war. The Führer was *sui generis*. The world had never seen such a destructive force before and will, it is hoped, never see anything like it again. The problems of Europe in the late 1930s, after Hitler's rise, did not have diplomatic solutions.

Nevertheless, I contend that, if there had been an alternative historical path that preserved the peace, it would have followed the lines drawn by those three statesmen, supported at home by those who embraced their diplomatic styles. Germany was particularly important. The greatest chance for peace was the preservation of that domestic coalition in Germany that had supported Stresemann's rapprochement with Western Europe, a Baptist-bootlegger alliance of the left and the center-right. It was across this domestic tightrope that Stresemann is seen guiding Germany on the cover, trying to bring Germany safely across the abyss toward peace. If there is to be a lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians,

recent history shows that a similar partnership in Israel will be a necessary (although not a sufficient) condition.

As detailed in chapter 4, Stresemann did his best to attract the support of the nationalist right, which preferred a coercive diplomatic style to reach the same goals—an alteration of the eastern borders of Germany, new colonies, and the end of occupation by France. He was unable to do so. Instead he had to rely on the center-left, in particular the Social Democrats. Stresemann's center-right did not have the numbers he needed in the parliament without the German left. And in such a polarized political climate, both internationally and domestically, the Social Democrats alone could not pull it off. It required the cover provided by Stresemann, who could credibly claim to speak for those Germans who were not "internationalists" in any ideological sense. He and his DVP could not be accused of being traitors to Germany (although the nationalists tried). This is the great virtue of a diplomatic coalition that crosses the political spectrum.

That Stresemann was able to attract the support of the SPD indicates the distinction made between liberals and realists in international relations theory is overdrawn. Historically in international relations theory, realism is contrasted to liberalism. The two form the bookends of courses on international relations. Michael Williams calls it "one of the oldest and most pervasive contrasts" (2005: 129). Classic realists in the field—Edward Carr (1964), Hans Morgenthau (1948), and Robert Osgood (1953)—situate their arguments against liberal utopianism. Despite this, liberal reason and pragmatic rationality are similar in that they both involve careful deliberation to see things as they really are, as opposed to unthinking, noncalculating, emotional, subjective, and passionate decision making (Berki 1981). The two diplomatic styles differ in that the former involves a genuine consideration of, although not a capitulation to, the interests of others in a genuine effort to reach a mutually beneficial outcome (Zacher and Matthew 1995). Nevertheless, where state interests align, realists would offer identical advice about the merits of diplomacy. Realism is ultimately more pessimistic than liberalism about the ability to transcend the nature of power politics (Zacher and Matthew 1995; Rathbun 2010); however, this does not foreclose the possibility of, many times, there being significant mutual interests among states other than alliances against a common foe. All realists should agree that conflict can be needlessly expensive and distract from the core vital interests of a country. A. J. H. Murray writes of realism, "the national interest is defined so as to incorporate an obligation to self-limitation and tolerance. The statesman is obliged to define interests in terms compatible with those of other states" (1996: 104). Realists are, in terms used by Ken Booth and Nicolas Wheeler, not "transcenders" of state conflict, nor are they "fatalists." Rather, they are "mitigators" of state conflict (Booth and Wheeler 2008: 11).

Although in theory realism and liberalism might be very different, in practice they are often on the same side. The true opponents of a liberal diplomacy (and foreign policy) are the nationalist advocates of coercive bargaining. Center-right realists, although sharing the egoistic orientation of the far right, often have more in common with the left in terms of their policy agendas. In practice, we should not think of realists in crude terms as militaristic saber-rattlers, as we often mistakenly do but, instead, as the shrewd pragmatists they are. They are often the best friends to liberals who need to shore up their domestic political base.

Neglecting the qualitative difference in diplomatic style between pragmatic realists and coercive bargainers leads to faulty empirical conclusions. In the case of 1920s Germany, both constructivists and structural realists have argued that Stresemann was ultimately no different from other nationalist politicians of his era and would have backed Hitler's rise to power, as other prominent conservatives did. Stresemann was "fairly typical," according to Jeffrey Legro (2005: 96). "It is not difficult to imagine the pragmatic Stresemann, had he lived and remained in power, traveling the same path to Hitler that the Heinrich Brüning, Franz von Papen, and Kurt von Schleicher governments followed" (Legro 2005: 96). If this assessment is true, Stresemann and the DVP were not practitioners of pragmatic statecraft, and Briand and the Cartel des Gauches had no real epistemic motivation but, rather, were idealistic dupes tricked by the cagey foreign minister into believing what they wanted to believe.

Both Legro (2005) and Dale Copeland (2000) argue that the 1920s demonstrate a seamless continuity with prewar nationalist and militaristic policies of Germany (and those of Hitler afterward). Legro attributes this to cultural factors; Copeland attributes it to structural pressures derived from geography and the balance of power. From this, Legro concludes that, even under Stresemann, the return of Germany to great power status "would ultimately rest on the renewal and use of military power in the service of territorial expansion" (2005: 94). Copeland states that "it is hard not to conclude that this 'man of peace', had he commanded the military power of Germany in 1939, would have reignited the heroic *Drang nach Osten*" (2000: 124).

Both are wrong. Legro and Copeland reach their empirically indefensible conclusions because they lack the proper conceptual tools. They are unable to distinguish realism from nationalism and pragmatic statecraft from coercive bargaining. As a consequence, international relations scholars are still searching to establish an accurate picture of Stresemann.

Stresemann was not a genuine advocate of European integration. The hagiographies of the early 1930s after his untimely death were indeed off the mark. The foreign minister was pursuing only national goals, not European ones. But this does not make him a likely ally of fascism. That

is a false dichotomy. As Jonathan Wright explains, “Stresemann did not believe that the League had transformed the nature of international relations. . . . He distinguished his policy from the illusions of those on the left as well as the right” (1995: 127). Stresemann did want major changes in the postwar system; however, that is something different entirely from arguing that the foreign minister was a wolf in sheep’s clothing.

Legro makes reference to Stresemann’s acknowledgment that Germany had no choice but to pursue a peaceful policy of revision given the heavily skewed distribution of power; however, this is hardly equivalent to Stresemann’s advocating another war had Germany been stronger. In fact, there is almost no evidence that the foreign minister had such a strategy in mind and much evidence that he did not. Stresemann was contemplating peaceful solutions when he spoke of the “free hand” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 88–95) he would have in the east after any rapprochement with the west (Wright 2002: 313; Cohrs 2006: 228). France and Britain would provide the diplomatic backing to negotiate border changes; “I am not thinking of war in relation to the eastern question,” he stated (in Wright 2002: 345). Wright argues, “He never tried to predict that future in detail, though there are [no indications] that he thought of a new German military empire in Europe” (2002: 378–79).

In fact, Stresemann thought more could be accomplished through diplomacy than through force. He said privately to his DVP allies, “The only policy which can succeed is that which aims to become a worthwhile ally for other nations, so as at the moment of becoming a useful ally to receive from the other side *what you never get* with old, buried guns” (in Wright 2002: 285, emphasis added). Stresemann opposed the use of force not out of principled reasons, of course, but from pragmatic and utilitarian ones consistent with his realism. That does not make him a Hitler or even a garden-variety German nationalist of the type that populated the DNVP. He wrote, “One could imagine a German foreign policy which is based on forgetting nothing and having only one goal: to recover Germany’s old position. Even if Germany were a military power, one would have to be clear in conducting such a policy that one would thereby bring back to life an alliance of the whole world against Germany” (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 157–59; Wright 2002: 325). Those few allusions by Stresemann to the use of force as the ultimate arbiter were always made in the same context, in efforts to gain adherents on the nationalist right to his style of diplomacy, as in conversations with military leaders such as General Hans von Seeckt (Wright 1995: 121–29). In his infamous letter to the crown prince, he identified a number of long-term objectives for Germany, including unification with Austria (Stresemann, Vol. 2: 159, 503–6). This should not be surprising. After all, as a rightist politician, he had a proself motivation in diplomacy. Nevertheless,

Stresemann never made any commitment to a forceful change. Even before nationalist crowds, he spoke of a “carefully considered policy to find a way, working with other nations, to re-establish the right of self-determination where it is violated” (in Wright 2002: 378; ADAP, B1/2: 665–69). As a consequence, von Seeckt and those like him disliked and distrusted Stresemann immensely and frequently spoke of removing him from power (Gatzke 1954: 13, 37–38).

It is true that “by design” (Copeland 2000: 123) the Locarno treaty did not lock in the eastern borders of Germany. But Stresemann was always upfront with his interlocutors about wanting those lines redrawn. He just did not imagine that force was necessary to do so. The very fact that Stresemann negotiated such a treaty indicates that he did not view it as merely a scrap of paper. If the foreign minister truly had had such designs, why did he not simply negotiate a treaty guaranteeing the status quo in the east, thus lowering the guard of the allies, and strike when Germany was ready?

Stresemann did, indeed, know about the limited covert rearmament programs of the Reichswehr, but he put little stock in it. “I consider all the elaborate games to recover power secretly as total nonsense. You cannot produce heavy artillery or build a thousand planes secretly, that damages our foreign policy without bringing us anything,” he said at the time (in Wright 2002: 285). Stresemann tolerated the covert programs so as not to provoke a powerful domestic adversary. For the foreign minister, the merits of limited rearmament lay in repressing a potential internal socialist revolution, not in overturning the geographical status quo (Gatzke 1954: 25).

The foreign minister’s biographer, Jonathan Wright, concludes, “It is unthinkable that he would have embarked on the same policy, which was a denial of everything he stood for.” Stresemann said of Hitler in 1923 that the future Führer was “only able to destroy” (in Wright 1995: 131). Legro and Copeland are confused by what Wright calls his “consummate blend of statesmanlike argument and nationalist rhetoric” and distracted by the latter (2002: 346).

Israel is still searching for its Stresemann, or more broadly, for a strong party backing pragmatic statecraft on the center-right. The search for Stresemann’s true nature as historical figure is ultimately an academic debate, but finding his equivalent in Israeli politics could go a long way toward ending the protracted conflict with the Palestinians. With the Labor Party decimated in parliamentary strength, some pragmatic statecraft is the best hope on the Israeli side for a final status agreement with the Palestinians.

In the early years of the new millennium, it appeared that Israel might indeed have found such a political figure and force in the form of Ariel

Sharon. Even as he ruthlessly repressed the intifada, the new prime minister plotted a political exit strategy. While the peace process was frozen, Prime Minister Sharon announced in December 2003 a significant unilateral move—a total withdrawal of the IDF from the Gaza strip and the dismantling of all settlements there as well as four settlements in the northern West Bank. This disengagement would require relocating thousands of settlers (Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 35). This was a significant departure from the coercive diplomatic style of previous Likud administrations in that it released a bargaining chip without a concession from the Palestinians (Freilich 2012: 177; Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 33; Bar-Siman-Tov and Michael 2007: 275). Sher Arian and Michael Shamir write, “The call for unilateral actions negated decades of Zionist demands for recognition and negotiation as conditions for concessions” (2008: 700).

Sharon’s actions were indicative of a commitment to pragmatic statecraft, a different diplomatic style (Waxman 2008; Rabinovich 2011: 129; Arian and Shamir 2008: 700). The prime minister had come to the conclusion that demographic realities made it impossible for Israel to continue to hold the territories while still retaining the Jewish identity of Israel (Freilich 2012: 180; Bar-Siman-Tov and Michael 2007: 264–65). “Disengagement recognizes the demographic reality on the ground specifically, bravely and honestly,” said Sharon (in Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 25). Ehud Olmert, his ally and the mayor of Jerusalem, said of his plan, “Above all hovers the cloud of demographics” (in Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 23). The prime minister had also determined, in light of the second intifada, that the Palestinians could not be suppressed forever (Freilich 2012: 180; Bar-Siman-Tov and Michael 2007: 264–65). Palestinians and Israelis were in a deadlock detrimental to both sides. Sharon famously declared, “I think the idea that it is possible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation . . . is bad for Israel. . . . Controlling 3.5 million Palestinians cannot go on forever” (in Waxman 2008).

Sharon was carefully ranking priorities. He distinguished between “goals worth fighting for, because they are truly vital, like Jerusalem, the big settlement blocs, the security areas and preservation of Israel’s character as a Jewish state, as opposed to objectives which we all clearly know will not be achieved and which most of the public is justifiably unwilling to sacrifice a great deal for” (Freilich 2012: 179). Disengagement from these areas would allow Israel to focus its interests on “trying to save as much as possible of Judea and Samaria” (Freilich 2012: 179). The prime minister was pragmatically cutting Israeli losses.

The prime minister’s decision was particularly surprising given Sharon’s history as a patron of the settler movement and a hard-liner when it came to dealing with the Palestinians and other Arab adversaries (Rabinovich 2011: 129). When he was foreign minister, he had urged the

settlers to “run and grab the hills” after the Wye agreement (Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 26). In this way, he was very similar to Stresemann, who during World War I had been a virulent German nationalist.

There had been signs of Sharon’s pragmatism in his earlier stint as foreign minister under Netanyahu. In discussions with Qurie, he said, “I am inclining towards a restricted but definite objective that would be achievable. This will not be peace, but a stage below it, a kind of truce. We need an entity made up of geographically linked territories under the Palestinian Authority” (Qurie 2008: 45). Sharon was settling for coexistence not peace, conflict management not conflict resolution (Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 26). Israelis would take the bird in the hand.

Sharon’s plan created a huge division in the Likud Party between party moderates and the right wing, suggesting the familiar divide based on epistemic motivation observed in previous chapters. The center-right embraced Sharon’s pragmatic statecraft, whereas the far right did not (Rabinovich 2011: 130; Miller 2008: 322; Kurtzer et al. 2013: 159). The prime minister submitted his plan to the Likud Party for a referendum, which it rejected in May 2004. Netanyahu and four other cabinet ministers had issued a joint statement opposing disengagement. An amended plan, in which the cabinet would decide whether and which settlements to dismantle in four consecutive steps, was passed (Freilich 2012: 184–88; Bar-Siman-Tov and Michael 2007: 267–72). This was the same staged solution, preserving bargaining leverage, that had emerged from the Likud cabinet deliberations after the Wye River summit. Even so, the Knesset held two votes of no confidence in which fifteen of forty Likud members defected, voting against Sharon. In the fall, Netanyahu resigned from the cabinet and contested the Likud leadership on a program of opposition to disengagement. The rebel ranks included half of the Likud parliamentarians.

Sharon’s diplomatic style of pragmatic statecraft therefore required left-wing support. Sharon brought Labor into a national unity coalition in December 2004 when the right-wing NRP resigned (Freilich 2012: 188–89). As was the case in Germany in the 1920s, the Israeli left and center-right formed a Baptist-bootlegger coalition against the right based on differences in diplomatic style. Labor had fought the 2003 elections on a program of disengagement in light of its belief that it no longer had a Palestinian partner (Arian and Shamir 2008; Rynhold and Waxman 2008; Freilich 2012: 178). Dov Waxman writes that the alignment “took the policy of territorial withdrawal from the Left, and the Right’s skepticism about the possibility of achieving Israel-Palestinian peace and pessimism about the ability of Israelis and Palestinians to live together” (2008: 89). By September 2005, 8,000 settlers had been removed from twenty-one settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank, some through force.

The divisions in Likud were so profound that in November 2005 the prime minister announced his departure from Likud and the creation of an alternative party, called Kadima. Public opinion polls showed that voters who defected from Likud to Kadima had a different diplomatic style than those who stayed with the traditional Israeli party of the right. Kadima supporters were only slightly less pessimistic about the likelihood of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians than were Likud loyalists but were much more skeptical than Labor voters. Yet, like Labor voters, they largely endorsed Sharon's disengagement plan, whereas Likud voters did not. Kadima voters were a "specific combination of the Left and the Right: a growing willingness for compromise from the Left together with deep mistrust of the Palestinians . . . from the Right." It was a "pragmatic middle ground" (Shamir et al. 2008).

Sharon's gamble paid off, but he was not able to enjoy the victory. Before the 2006 Knesset elections that yielded a plurality for his party and ultimately a governing coalition with Labor and Shas, he suffered a debilitating stroke. In yet another parallel between the two periods, the poor health of this unlikely leader of the pragmatic center-right deprived him of his chance to make history (Stresemann died in 1929 at the relatively young age of fifty-one). In Israel, Ehud Olmert took up the position of prime minister and head of the new party. The former mayor of Jerusalem, along with Tzipi Livni, his new foreign minister, and others, had shifted his diplomatic thinking based on pragmatism—what he perceived as irreversible demographic trends and the lack of a viable military solution to the conflict (Freilich 2012: 180). "Above all hovers the cloud of demographics," he said before becoming prime minister (in Miller 2008: 23; Rynhold and Waxman 2008: 23). Aaron Miller describes him as "smart, centrist, and pragmatic" (2008: 356).

Under Kadima leadership, the Israelis announced a "convergence plan," withdrawing from the outer settlements in the West Bank and consolidating an Israeli state with the large settlement blocs closer to Israel proper (Rabinovich 2011: 163–64; Kurtzer et al. 2013: 214). Ideally this was to be negotiated with the Palestinians; however, Olmert would go forward unilaterally as well. In November 2007, the Israelis came to the table with the Palestinians in Annapolis, Maryland, under the tepid and inattentive brokering of the George W. Bush administration (Kurtzer et al. 2013: 226). Subsequent talks nevertheless demonstrated flexibility on both sides. Olmert was willing to consider accepting up to 15,000 Palestinian refugees in exchange for a Palestinian pledge to end the conflict as well as to place the Holy Basin (the Old City of Jerusalem and the adjacent area) under the control of a trusteeship of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United States, Israel, and Palestine. The differences between the two sides on territory narrowed considerably, with Israel indicating a much

greater willingness to swap land in exchange for annexing major settlement blocs (Rabinovich 2011: 176–80; Kurtzer et al. 2013: 228–31).

Abbas, now the president of the Palestinian Authority, never formally responded to the Israeli proposals, and before the peace process could gain momentum, Olmert was forced to resign due to corruption charges. With Livni unable to form a coalition, new elections were held in February 2009 that, although yielding another plurality for Kadima, saw Benjamin Netanyahu return as prime minister.

Early in his new tenure, Netanyahu for the first time endorsed a two-state solution to the conflict with the Palestinians. Were diplomacy only about foreign policy goals and not at all about style, this might have led naturally to negotiations and a final peace settlement. As I have argued, however, diplomatic style is also crucial, and Netanyahu embraced the coercive bargaining approach that was evident in his first term as prime minister. The first few years of his second stint were marked by very public disagreements with U.S. President Barack Obama about ending Israeli settlement activity as a precondition for starting peace talks that bring to mind the disputes between Shamir and President George H. W. Bush in the early 1990s. If Netanyahu is to bring peace, he will have to disassociate himself from the political right he has always called home and stake out a new political base allowing for pragmatic diplomacy.

Of course, this is not the only major problem to be solved before there can be a final peace agreement. The control of Hamas over Gaza looms large over any negotiations. And any progress is likely to precipitate a new wave of violent spoiler behavior from Palestinian extremists, which will tempt the Israelis to respond forcefully.

Observers generally believe that any final agreement between the two sides will approach that put together by President Clinton in his last days of office. Clinton proposed a Palestinian state consisting of 94–96 percent of the territory of the current West Bank with a compensation of 1–3 percent of Israeli territory so that the major Israeli settlements could be incorporated into Israel. Jerusalem would be divided, with the Palestinians controlling the Arab and Christian parts of the city and the Israelis the Jewish parts. The Temple Mount, however, would be under Palestinian sovereignty, with the Israelis holding the Western Wall. Israel would recognize the suffering of the refugees but would not be obliged to see to their return (Rabinovich 2011: 111–16; Meital 2006: 83–88; Malley and Agha 2001: 74; Pressman 2003). Indeed, that bridging proposal bears a striking resemblance to the Abbas-Beilin framework that arose in 1995 (Beilin 1999: 155; Rabinovich 2011: 51). Beilin writes of those talks, “The best solution for either side is one that the other cannot accept. So, in the end, a solution has to be found whereby each side concedes part of its dream. Not all of it. . . . In the Stockholm track we tried

to square this circle. Our aim was to grant to each side what it considered most important, so long as this did not damage the interests of the other" (1999: 187). The talks were value creating in nature, demonstrating "remarkable creativity while protecting the core interests of each nation" (Beilin 1999: 155).

This should make us cautiously optimistic. Differences in interests are sometimes impossible to bridge, thereby imposing a structural impediment to peace that no agency can alter, at least not in the short to medium term. In contrast, diplomacy is something over which decision makers exert agency. Diplomacy can add value, if leaders let it.

